

Advice 20-2019 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the evaluation of the analysis program of the FASFC regarding forbidden substances in the food chain

Background & Terms of reference

The Scientific Committee has been asked to give advice on the programming and the results of the analyses programme regarding forbidden substances in the food chain. More specifically it is asked:

- to evaluate the results of analyses regarding forbidden substances in the food chain and, for data for which it is feasible, to observe and to analyse any potential trend;
- to identify lacunas in the analysis programme regarding forbidden substances in the food chain, which appear to be especially relevant in the framework of the safeguarding of the safety of the food chain;
- to identify therapeutic lacuna's on the field which might lead to the use of forbidden substances;
- to identify forbidden substances of which the cost-benefit ratio might cause food producers to use them;
- to evaluate the analysis programme.

Methodology

This advice is primarily based on expert opinion and on the study of results of analysis performed by the FASFC.

Results and Conclusions

The Scientific Committee had the opportunity to take note of the results which were obtained in the framework of the analysis programme regarding forbidden substances in the food chain. A trend analysis was performed on these results. This resulted in the identification of a limited number of trends, namely concerning the parameters packaging in (raw materials for) feed, corticosteroids in urine and animal tissues, fish and bone meal in (raw materials for) feed and polymerized triglycerides in (raw materials for) animal feed and deep-frying fat. Based on these trends, recommendations were formulated in order to optimize the analysis programme.

It is not easy to predict which forbidden substances could be used in the food chain for profit. Measures to increase alertness in this respect are the following up on scientific literature, to maintain good communication with the laboratories and with the controllers and stakeholders in the field in order to be quickly informed of prohibited substances that have never been detected before. Any signal from the central contact point for consumers and operators (https://apps.digital.belgium.be/forms/show_/afsca/home?lng=en) may also be relevant in this context. In order to structurally assess all this already available information, it is recommended that the service responsible for the capture of signals take these into account. It is recommended that a risk profile be drawn up of substances thus identified based on a number of parameters such as cost price, potential benefits, ease of purchase (Internet sales), etc.

It is recommended to use high resolution mass spectrometry or another nonspecific method on a regular base in order to detect upcoming hazards regarding forbidden substances. If emerging hazards are identified the necessary analysis methods need to be developed or the existing methods need to be expanded with the inclusion of new components.

The full text is available on this website in Dutch and in French.